

Farmer's Problems.

The editor of the Farm Journal was the first, so far as we know, to advocate Rural Free Delivery for the benefit of farmers. He is not pleased with the way in which it has been developed, and expresses his opinions in vigorous language, as follows:

I

As is well known, the Farm Journal was one of the early advocates of free rural mail delivery, and our files will show articles written more than a dozen years ago in favor of it. Never, at any time, have we been more in favor of it than we are now. We did not see why, if city people should have their mail carried to them, the same favor should not be extended to country people. Those opposed to the measure said that the case was different, in this, that the distances in the country are so great that it would be practically impossible to deliver mail to all citizens, the expense would be too much. But the city resident has from four to six deliveries a day right at his door; the ruralist would be satisfied with one or two in his box at the end of the lane.

II

The present administration of the Postoffice Department, at Washington, is not responsible for the establishment of the present system, therefore any criticism that we may make, need not be considered as aimed at it; in fact, it is not our wish, or purpose, to criticize or blame any one; what we shall say is inspired solely in the interest of better service, of a reform badly needed, and which is, through the confession and perplexity that are apparent in the rural postal system, rapidly becoming imperative. We want to see every citizen have his mail delivered as promptly as possible, at the least cost possible, and to that end our efforts are directed. We do not wish one-fourth service in this way, while the other three-fourths are without such facilities; and we do not wish to see large deficits in the revenues of the Postoffice Department that are now threatened.

III

When rural free delivery was started the United States was honeycombed with postal routes, and every man was within a convenient distance of a postoffice, or could easily become so. Apart from the fact that the mails were not delivered, we had probably the most efficient and satisfactory system in the world. The people were universally satisfied with it, nay, proud of it. Few complaints ever reached Washington that anything was wrong, and such as did reach the capital, were easily satisfied. How has it been since? We might leave our readers to determine that question. Have there been complaints or not? Well, assuming that there is but one answer to the question, we undertake to say that the cause of the complaints that have arisen and gone to Washington is, that a magnificent postal system covering our whole country, instead of being amended, enlarged and perfected, was being torn up by the roots, postoffices that had existed for years, and well served their purposes, were threatened with extinction, compelling some who were entirely satisfied with their postal facilities, to adopt a system to which they were advised, giving the favor of free delivery to only a small portion of the population, while the vast majority were not so favored. Where before every soul was satisfied, no serious complaint coming from any quarter, vast multitudes of people were so greatly disturbed at the ill-advised changes that were being made, or threatened, that the country was filled with criticisms and lamentations. (A subscriber writes that his postoffice was discontinued against a remonstrance containing 115 names. This is only one of many similar instances.)

IV

We have not the slightest doubt that there was any occasion whatever for making such a disturbance. It was

entirely unnecessary and uncalled for. To destroy the old system by shutting up the local postoffices, or threatening to do so, and having the mails delivered wholly from the larger towns, should never have been considered for an instance, which covered the whole country in a most admirable system, well nigh perfect, was folly of the most pronounced kind. To compel rural citizens to do their postal business in the public roads, in all sorts of weather, or not to do it at all, where before they had a convenient office under shelter, was an absurdity so bold, an injustice so glaring, that it is most singular that it did not so strike the officials who were at the helm at Washington. When the department was assailed from every quarter with complaints and with remonstrances against the changes, made and contemplated, it seems marvelous that the department did not pause in its destructive work, take new bearings, and try to satisfy the people who were complaining and to give the country what it wanted; try to improve the service that the country had rather than to destroy it, for the sake of an experiment over which there was so much dissatisfaction; try to build up on the solid basis then existing, rather than tear down, and build anew, without any reasonable basis at all!

V

In order to make matters clear, we have inquired into the workings of the postal system in the county in which we live, Montgomery, as now constituted after several years of partial free delivery, and find that in this county here are 150 postoffices, of which seventeen form the starting places of routes. There are in all thirty-three rural routes, the carriers traversing a distance altogether of about 800 miles a day. It was the original intention of the wise ones who hatched out the present system in the beginning, to eventually shut up a majority of the rural offices, and thus save cost sufficient to carry free delivery, but so far we do not find that more than two such offices have been wiped out. The offices being kept open and running, about all the old star routes are retained, so that, in addition to the carrier service, there still exist thirty-five star oppositions, .lygkqj gkqj gkqjgkq bm routes, nearly 800 miles in length; so, in fact, there was such a storm of opposition to destroying the old system, that it had to be retained, and is now in operation, pretty much as formerly. Hence we have a dual system covering the same ground, with dual cost. Only a smarmy fraction of the rural population is served by carrier, and to serve all, the free delivery system would cost probably five times as much as it does now. And yet the old postoffices and old star routes can not be given up. This is in our own county, and is simply an epitome of the entire country.

VI

The star routes and the carriers' routes cover the same territory, they run criss-cross everywhere. This is the present deplorable condition of the service, brought about by a wrong start, by aiming to tear down and build anew, instead of holding all that was good in the old system, and building upon that.

VII

And it was chiefly brought about by the politicians at the large towns, who wanted postal affairs centered there, for the purposes well understood, regardless of the wishes and the welfare of the people of the smaller towns and villages. It would magnify the importance of the big borough postmaster, to have all mails carried out from his office, increase the patronage of the men who bossed things, and so the new system was begun. It was a game of the politicians, with the people left out, and the result is, as we have shown, a dual system with dual cost, with only a small fraction of the rural public served by carrier, with no room for expansion without facing an enormous deficit, with the country full of sore heads, when,

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formerly, everybody gloried in the most magnificent postal system existing in the world.

VIII

There is no chance the way things are jumbled, with the confusion and crisscross conditions that exist, with two systems where there ought to be but one, of utilizing the telephone as it should be; nor, if the rural postoffices are largely closed up, as has always been contemplated, would it be possible to establish the postal savings bank, an institution that is very badly needed. Our rural population should have, as city people have, safe deposit banks close at hand to promote thrift among all classes; and the government should establish banks open to deposits at a low rate of interest, throughout all the country. Such institutions exist in the civilized countries of Europe; why should our progressive people be deprived of them? They should be an adjunct of every rural postoffice. Moreover, what chance is there of a parcel post under the new system? None whatever.

IX

It is easy to pick flaws and find fault, harder to suggest a remedy. Our remedy could have been applied quite easily in the beginning, not so easily now. But there is no other way. The old local offices should be restored to their old footing. Not only that, but they should be made the centers of postal affairs, and the carriers should go out from them. The present long routes can gradually be discontinued and the enormous cost saved to the government, where they conflict with star routes, but not until new deliveries are begun from the local offices. The star routes are already established; so are the local post offices, and considerable expense can be saved that way. A man does not need a post office quite so near to him if he has his mail delivered, as if he goes for it. But no post office now running, that a considerable number of people want, should be abolished. Then those who want free delivery can have it, those who do not, need not. Each man to take his choice, and it will be found that many will prefer to go for their mail. More than one delivery a day can easily be made if wanted and the situation warrants. The postmaster's assistant can act as carrier, or some other man in the village who keeps a horse or a wheel. A carrier might act for one or more offices. It is a local affair, the carrier man have

other business, his little farm or village lot, on which he partially obtains a living.

The telephone is utilized to notify of the arrival of important letters that are looked for, after the carrier has gone his rounds. A postal bank is established to receive the savings of the people; bad for the saloons, but great for the good of the community and the nation. A good parcel post is established, and the farmers may send small packages of produce, at small cost direct to the city consumer, without paying an exorbitant toll to the greedy express companies. The soul of the nation will stay and flourish as ever in the rural village.

X

Once again the people of the United States will have a postal system of which they will never complain, and of which they will, as formerly, take a just and patriotic pride. The perplexity that now assails the postal authorities at Washington will gradually disappear, and the deficit, which is looming up in the distance, will not pass their way. Now, brethren of the Farm Journal family, help us in this good work.

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